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ABSTRACT

Data from the National Longitudinal Study (NLS) of the high school class of 1972 (statistics on a national sample of young adults as they moved out of high school into early adulthood) were used to test rural young adults' sex role orientation and the rural-urban differential in sex role orientation. NLS data were collected for the base year (1972) and three follow-up years (1973, 1974, 1976). Variables utilized for the 15,845 young adults in this study were primarily from the third follow-up, except for background information, which was base-year data. The dependent variable was young adults' sex role attitudes; place of residence and social characteristics of the respondents were selected as independent variables influencing sex role attitudes. Ten Likert-type attitudinal questions related to sex role were asked in the 1976 interview. Place of residence was measured by respondents' residence during 1972, when they were in high school and living at home, thus indicating rural or urban origins. Data indicated that rural young adults had more traditional sex role orientation than urban young adults, even when other social characteristics affecting sex role attitudes were controlled. However, the magnitude of differences between rural and urban youth was found to be relatively weak. (CM)

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RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES IN SEX ROLE ORIENTATIONS

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RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES IN SEX ROLE ORIENTATIONS

Abstract

This paper tested the following hypotheses:

(1) Rural young adults have more traditional sex role orientations than do urban young adults.

(2) The rural-urban differentials in sex role orientations will not be supported after controlling the major social characteristics which have effects on sex role attitudes.

The data of this research were drawn from a large national sample of young adults. The first hypothesis was supported, but, the second hypothesis was not supported. It means that rural youth have more traditional sex role orientations than urban youth even with controlling other characteristics. The magnitude of the differences between rural and urban youth in sex role orientations, however, was relatively weak.

Background

There is considerable disagreement among social scientists concerning the importance of the rural-urban differences in contemporary American society. One of the major viewpoints exemplifies the idea of "mass society" (Bensman and Rosenberg, 1963; Wilensky, 1964; Glenn, 1967). This position originated in the writings of Herbert Gans (1962), among others, who asserts that there are few differences between urban and rural populations: those which do exist are attributable to differences in age, ethnicity, life cycle, or social class -- not to any autonomous effect of ecological factors. Therefore, rural-urban differences, whatever their source, tend to disappear as they derive the advanced stages of urbanization and industrialization. The two sectors would merge into one indistinguishable "mass society" due to such influences as standardized education, development of modern transportation, and mass communication systems. Improved highways and rapid transit methods break down rural isolation. Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and motion pictures provide common information to persons throughout various segments of the society. Urban culture and life style are diffused to rural areas. The consequence of this urban-to-rural diffusion eliminates distinction of these two sectors and produces a homogenous mass society. However, so far, no social scientist has denied that considerable urban-to-rural diffusion has occurred in modern society, but the extent to which this diffusion has closed the rural-urban gap remains an issue of debate (Glenn and Hill, 1978).

While decreasing importance in explaining rural-urban differences in terms of ecological factors in recent years, Fisher (1975) reintroduces the variable of population size in explaining the rural-urban distinction. He asserts that "population concentration produces a diversity of subcultures, strengthens them and fosters diffusion among them" (Fisher, 1975, p. 1319). The greater

the variety and size of subcultures in a place, the greater the awareness of and tolerance for diverse values and life style. Therefore, according to Fisher, population size, density, and heterogeneity are conducive to innovation and unconventional behavior. The implications of Fisher's model are noted by Glenn and Hill (1979, p. 353) as follows:

> If in each society the cities tend to be the sources of innovation and to be in the vanguard of social and cultural change, appreciable rural-urban differences are likely to exist even if much urban-to-rural diffusion of culture has occurred and is occurring. During the initial phases of any particular process of change, the urban population will tend to change more rapidly, leading to rural-urban divergence. Later, 'ceiling effects' will tend to limit the rate of change in the urban population, and urban-to-rural diffusion will lead to more rapid change in the rural population and to rural-urbance convergence. Thus, as older rural-urban differences diminish or disappear, new ones will appear. Whereas no particular cultural traits, aside from those closely associated with rural or urban communities, important rural-urban differences of some kind will tend to persist even in the most urbanized and industrialized societies.

The Research Problem

Important changes have occurred in American life. Beliefs and attitudes about the appropriate activities and behavior for men and women, particularly, have changed greatly during the past decade. One of the most far-reaching social changes in family has been the comparatively enhanced status of women; increasingly married women combine paid employment with traditional homemaker roles. The result of this change toward equality in male-female status and less stereotyped division of tasks in the home and family. A growing body of empirical evidence indicates that these changes have been accompanied by a pervasive shift from traditional to modern attitudes concerning extrafamilial roles for women and a more egalitarian conception concerning husband-wife roles (Mason, et al., 1976; Monteiro, 1978; Parnes, et al., 1975; Thornton and Freedman, 1979).

This paper addresses the question of whether the adaptation of egalitarian sex role attitudes is pervasive throughout society and affects rural and urban segments of the population. Past research studies have indicated that egalitarian conjugal role relationships structured by household tasks appeared more often among urban couples than their rural counterparts (Goldberg, 1959; Blood, 1958; Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Centers et al., 1971). Analyzing the national Gallup opinion index between 1965 to 1975, Larson (1978) indicated that rural populations hold conservative beliefs and norms about family life and appropriate behavior for women. For example, rural people were markedly more in favor of increasing the difficulty of obtaining divorces than were urban people. They were more likely to disapprove of women drinking alcohol in public places; they were more opposed to making birth control pills available to everyone; they were more likely to prefer large numbers of children; they were more opposed to abortion and to termination of normal pregnancies. Furthermore, more rural people believed that premarital sex was wrong and found various expressions of nudity objectionable (Larson, 1978).

Drawing upon earlier formulation of Wirth (1938), Fisher (1975) hypothesized that greater urbanism should be associated with greater subcultural variety. As mentioned previously, a social or cultural change typically originates in cities and proceeds more rapidly among urban than rural people. The cities tend to be sources of innovation and unconventionality. If emerging egalitarian sex role ideology is assumed as a cultural change in normative sex role orientation, according to Fisher's postulation, it would hypothesize that urban people would have a more modern sex role perception than rural people. The present study uses a national sample of young adults to test this hypothesis.

Many studies have explored the relation between a person's sex-role attitudes or sex role norms and various demographic characteristics. For

example, Mason and Bumpass (1975) have found that education had the most pronounced effect on sex role ideology of American women. It indicated that higher educational attainment was associated with less traditional sex role orientation. The same notion was also found true for men in Yang's study (1981). Additional education, work for pay, and exposure to divorce was associated with shifts toward egalitarian sex role attitudes among women while additional births were associated with retaining traditional attitudes (Thornton and Freedman, 1979). As noted by Holter (1970), for young adults, sex role norms and sex-typed behavior are acquired by contact with socio-cultural agents, parents mostly. Parents' education and income are found positively related to daughter's role innovation (Tangri, 1972). Studies on the effect of mother's working on daughter's sex role orientation have indicated that mother's working decreases daughter's sex-typing of behavior (Tangri, 1972) and increases her career-orientation (Peterson, 1958). Race and religion were often identified to have effects on sex role norms. For example, Scanzoni (1975) found in the sample that among younger white men, non-Catholics were significantly more modern in a sex role dimension. Blacks were found to express more modern sex role attitudes than whites (Mason and Bumpass, 1975; Yang, 1981).

Since sex role attitudes were influenced by socio-demographic characteristics, as mentioned previously, the variation on the sex role attitudes may result from residential distribution of these characteristics. For example, rural people are found to have less educational attainment than urban residents, while educational attainment was identified as an important factor in influencing egalitarian sex role attitudes (Mason et al., 1976; Thornton and Freedman, 1979; Houser and Beckman, 1980).

Therefore, rural-urban differences on sex role attitudes may be reflected in direct effect by place of residence but may be rather spurious or reflect indirect effect throygh variables which intervene between place of residence

and sex role attitudes. To test for this possibility, another hypothesis is developed in which socio-demographic characteristics along with ecological factors will be taken into account. Thus, there are two hypotheses in this study:

Hypothesis 1 Rural young adults have more traditional sex role orientation than do urban young adults.

Hypothesis 2 The rural-urban differential in sex role orientation will not be supported after controlling the major social characteristics which have effects on sex role attitudes.

Methodology

The data used in this paper were drawn from the National Longitudinal Study (NLS) of the high school class of 1972. The NLS, supported by the National Center for Education Statistics and conducted by the Educational Testing Service and the Research Triangle Institute, was designed to provide statistics on a national sample of young adults as they moved out of high school into their early adulthood.

The NLS data were collected for the base-year (1972), first follow-up (1973), second follow-up (1974), and third follow-up (1976). The variables utilized in this study were primarily from the third follow-up (1976) except for respondents' background information which was from the base-year (1972) survey. A total of 15,845 young adults are the sample for the present study.

Variables and Statistical Method

The dependent variable in this study are young adults' sex role attitudes. Place of residence and social characteristics of the respondents were selected as independent variables influencing sex role attitudes.

Ten Likert-type attitudinal questions related to sex role were asked in the 1976 interview. The items were coded from one to four with one indicating strong disagreement with a modern sex role attitude and four indicating strong agreement. Respondents' final scores were computed by summing scores of the ten items. Higher scores indicated more modern sex role attitudes. The items pertaining to sex role orientations are listed as follows:

(1) A working mother of pre-school children can be just as good a mother as the woman who does not work.

(2) It is usually better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.

(3) Most women are just not interested in having big and important jobs.

(4) Most women are happiest when they are making a home and caring for children.

(5) It is more important for a wife to help her husband than to have a career herself.

(6) Men should be given first chance at most jobs because they have the primary responsibility for providing for a family.

(7) Young men should be encouraged to take jobs that are usually filled by women (nursing, secretarial work, etc.).

(8) Many qualified women can't get jobs: men with the same skills have much less trouble.

(9) High school counselors should urge young women to train for jobs which are now held mainly by men.

(10) Schools teach women to want the less important jobs.

Place of residence, selected as an independent variable, was measured by the location of the place in which the respondents lived during 1972. This information was obtained from the base year of the survey by assuming that during that period the respondent was in high school and resided in

his/her parental home. Therefore, this variable represents the respondents' rural or urban origins. The variable is broken down by the following categories according to the size of place: a rural or farming community, a small city or town of fewer than 50,000 people that is not a suburb of a larger place, a medium-sized city (50,000 - 100,000 people), a suburb of a medium-sized city, a large city (100,000 - 500,000 people), a suburb of a large city, a very large city (over 500,000 people), and a suburb of a very large city. To test the first hypothesis, mean scores of sex role attitudes were computed for each category for the place of residence variable.

The second hypothesis is to examine rural-urban differences of sex role attitudes by controlling social characteristics which have effects on sex role attitudes. Therefore, standard multiple regression analysis method was selected to test the second hypothesis. Multiple regression analysis permits study of the degree of relationship between a dependent variable (sex-role attitudes) and an independent variable (place of residence), controlling for one or more other independent variables. In the regression analysis, selected independent variables are: place of residence, family socio-economic status, religion, mother's work status, number of siblings, marital status, race, and education. The measurements of these variables are described as follows:

(1) Place of Residence: This is a dichotomous variable. It is coded zero if a respondent indicated living in a rural or farming community and one if otherwise.

(2) Family Socio-economic Status: Because of the relative youth of the sample, the relevant socio-economic status is represented by that of their parental family. The measure consists of three variables -- the highest educational levels that the respondent's father completed, mother completed, and the respondent's parents' income.

(3) Religion: The religion in which the respondent was brought up as reported in the base year survey. This is a dichotmous variable -- Catholic is coded zero and non-Catholic is coded one.

(4) Mother's Work Status: The work status of the respondent's mother is measured with a dichotomous variable which is coded one if the mother was reported to be working and zero if otherwise.

(5) Number of Siblings: This is the total number of brothers and sisters the respondent reported.

(6) Marital Status: The respondent's marital status is coded zero if the respondent was married in 1976 and coded one if not married.

(7) Race: This is a dichotomous variable set equal to one for a white respondent and zero otherwise.

(8) Education: This is a composite variable of respondent's current educational attainment and his/her future educational aspiration which refers to how far in school the respondent thought he or she would get.

Findings

Table 1 presents the mean sex role attitudes scores for each category in the place of residence. The distribution of these scores on various community sizes is statistically significant at 0.1% level. Young adults who lived in a rural or farming community show the most traditional attitude toward sex role norms, while those who lived in a very large city with population over 500,000 show the most modern conception. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 stated that rural young adults have more traditional sex role attitudes than do urban young adults is supported. Table 1 shows that the mean scores of sex role attitudes varied by size of places, however, the magnitude of difference is not large, ranging from 25.9 for rural or farm community to 27.5 for very large city.

(Table 1 about here).

As mentioned previously, a standard multiple regression analysis was also performed to study rural-urban difference of sex role attitudes. All data cases with missing values on any variables included in the regression equations

were excluded from the statistical computations. After deleting cases with missing values, a total of 6085 constituted the sample for the regression analysis. The means and standard deviations of the variables are shown in Table 2.

(Table 2 about here).

The regression results are shown in Table 3. The overall regression was statistically significant. Place of residence, father's education, marital status, mother's working status, race, and education were all statistically significant, either at 1% or 5% level, related to conception of sex role norms. Father's higher education or respondent's own educational attainment and aspiration would lead to more modern perception of sex role ideology which means a relatively more receptive attitude about egalitarian husband-wife role and extra-familial role for women. The data also showed that mother's involvement in work outside the home had a significant effect on young adult's modern perception of sex roles. Married young adults expressed more traditional perception in sex role attitudes than those non-married. Whites expressed more traditional sex role attitudes than non-whites.

Place of residence as shown in the regression equation, was statistically significant in affecting the modernity of sex role attitudes. Youths coming from a rural or farming community expressed more traditional attitudes than youths from other communities after controlling major characteristics which have effects on sex role attitudes. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

The standardized regression coefficient (beta weight) is usually used to measure the relative importance of variables in a regression analysis. Judging from the beta weights on Table 3, the composite variable of respondent's current educational attainment and educational aspiration showed the strongest effect on sex role attitudes (B = 0.21); next are race (B = -0.10) and mother working

(B = 0.08). Place of residence (B = 0.04), father's education (B = 0.03), and marital status (B = 0.04) all had a rather small magnitude in beta weight.

Conclusion

This paper addresses the question of whether rural-urban differences exist for sex role attitudes in modern American society. Two hypotheses mentioned previously were tested. The statistical result indicated that rural young adults have more traditional sex role orientation than do urban young adults. This holds true even with controlling other social characteristics which had effects on sex role attitudes.

Although rural-urban differences of sex role attitudes were all statistically significant in present research, caution should be used to examine the magnitude of differences between rural and urban youth. The place of residence does not appear as a major predictor of sex role attitudes. This can be seen from the small difference in mean scores among various population size of communities and the relatively weak magnitude of the beta weight on place of residence in regression analysis as compared to other variables, such as education and race. The conclusion of rural-urban difference of this study is tnat although the "mass society" concept was not proved in youth's sex role attitudes, the importance of rural-urban difference on youth's sex role attitudes should not be exaggerated.

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Table 1 Mean Scores of Sex Role Attitudes by Place of Residence

Place of Residence	Mean Score	N
1. a rural or farming community	25.9	3780
2. a small city or town of fewer than 50,000 people that is not a suburb of a larger place	26.7	4309
3. a medium-sized city (50,000 - 100,000 people)	26.8	1907
4. a suburb of a medium-sized city	27.0	1078
5. a large city (100,000 - 500,000 people)	27.1	1570
6. a suburb of a large city	27.3	1257
7. a very large city (over 500,000 people)	27.7	1018
8. a suburb of a very large city	27.5	926
Total	26.7	15845

$F = 48.36$

$D.F. = 7, 15837$

$P < 0.001$

Table 2 Means and Standard Deviations of the Variables in the Regression Analysis

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Father's education[a]	4.0629	2.2390
Mother's education[a]	3.7645	1.8788
Family income[b]	5.7864	2.8357
Marital status (Married = 1; Not married = 0)	0.5878	0.4923
Mother working (Mother worked = 1; Mother did not work = 0)	0.5499	0.4975
Religion (Non-Catholic = 1; Catholic = 0)	0.6970	0.4596
Number of Siblings	3.0703	2.1965
Race (White = 1; Non-White = 0)	0.8294	0.3762
Respondent's current education and educational aspiration[c]	4.0913	2.0294
Place of residence (Urban = 1; Rural = 0)	0.7721	0.4195
Sex role attitude	26.9972	3.8061

Number of cases = 6085

Table 2 Means and Standard Deviations of the Variables in the Regression Analysis Continued

[a]Father's and mother's education were coded as follows:

Did not complete high school	2
Finished high school or equivalent	3
Adult education program	4
Business or trade school	5
Some college	6
Finished college (four years)	7
Attended graduate or professional school (for example, law or medical school), but did not obtain a graduate or professional degree)	8
Obtained a graduate or professional degree (for example, M.A., Ph.D., or M.D.)	0

[b]Family income was the respondent's answer to the question in 1972, "What is the approximate income before taxes of your parents? Include taxable and non-taxable income from all sources." The answer was coded as follows:

Less than $3,000 a year (about $60 a week or less)	1
Between $3,000 and $5,999 a year (from $60 to $119 a week)	2
Between $6,000 and $7,499 a year (from $120 to $149 a week)	3
Between $7,500 and $8,999 a year (from $150 to $179 a week)	4
Between $9,000 and $10,499 a year (from $180 to $209 a week)	5
Between $10,500 and $11,999 a year (from $210 to $239 a week)	6
Between $12,000 and $13,499 a year (from $240 to $269 a week)	7
Between $13,500 and $14,999 a year (from $270 to $299 a week)	8
Between $15,000 and $18,000 a year (from $300 to $359 a week)	9
Over $18,000 a year (about $360 a week or more)	10

Table 2 Means and Standard Deviations of the Variables in the Regression Analysis Continued

[c]Educational attainment and aspiration was coded as follows:

High school only	1
Vocational trade, or business school	
Less than two years	2
Two years or more	3
College program	
Some college (including two-year degree)	4
Finished college (four- or five-year degree)	5
Master's degree or equivalent	6
Ph.D., M.D., or equivalent	7

Table 3 Regression Results of Sex Role Attitudes

Explanatory Variables	B	Beta	F-ratio
Mother's education	0.041	0.02	2.27
Father's education	0.073	0.03	5.71**
Family income	-0.002	-0.001	0.01
Marital status (Not married =1; Married = 0)	0.28	0.04	7.85*
Mother working (Mother worked = 1; Mother did not work = 0)	0.59	0.08	38.65*
Religion (Catholic = 1; Non-Catholic = 0)	-0.18	-0.02	3.06
Number of Siblings	-0.008	-0.004	0.11
Race (White = 1; Non-White = 0)	-1.02	-0.10	58.22*
Respondent's education	0.39	0.21	231.67*
Place of residence (Urban = 1; Rural = 0)	0.37	0.04	10.27*

Constant	25.15
F	56.59
Adjusted R^2	0.08
N	6085

*$p < 0.01$

**$p < 0.05$